

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of the claims replaces all prior versions and listing of the claims in the present application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) Method for cutting a workpiece made of one of stainless steel, coated steel, non-alloy steel and alloy steel by using a laser beam and an assist gas, in which at least one optical means is used to focus the laser beam at several focal points, separate from one another, and in which, as the assist gas for the [[said]] laser beam, a gas mixture containing hydrogen and at least one inert gas is used when cutting the workpiece made of one of stainless steel, coated steel, non-alloy steel and alloy steel.

2. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 1, wherein the optical means is transparent or reflecting and is chosen from lenses, mirrors and combinations thereof.

3. (canceled)

4. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the inert gas is chosen from nitrogen, argon, helium and mixtures thereof.

5. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the assist gas contains from 150 ppm by volume to 40% by volume of hydrogen, the balance being the inert gas.

6. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the assist gas consists of 5% by volume to 30% by volume of hydrogen, the balance being nitrogen.

7. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein a thickness of the workpiece to be cut is between 0.2 mm and 20 mm.

8. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein a cutting speed is between 0.5 m/min and 20 m/min.

9. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein said optical means is arranged so as to obtain at least one first focal point positioned near the upper surface of the workpiece to be cut or in the thickness of the workpiece to be cut in a region close to said upper surface, and at least one second focal point positioned near the lower surface of the workpiece to be cut and in the thickness of the latter, or outside the latter.

10. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the assist gas contains hydrogen in an amount adjusted according to the thickness and/or the constituent material of the workpiece to be cut.

11-12. (canceled)

13. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the assist gas contains from 0.5% by volume to 30% by volume of hydrogen, the balance being the inert gas.

14. (previously presented) The method according to  
claim 1, wherein a thickness of the workpiece to be cut is  
between 0.3 mm and 16 mm.